
Cartooning the conflict

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Michel Kichka

Some personal background

- 1 I have been a cartoonist for the press since 1997. It was when the 2nd Israeli channel started its morning programs this year, competing with the 1st channel. They tried to do something different. They asked me to come in the studio, to do a cartoon, live. We did a pilot. I would say “hello” at the beginning of the show, drew a cartoon during the show, off camera, which I commented upon at the end. I did this for ten years. This is how I got started. At first, we were right in the middle of the Intifada, I drew mostly on the conflict, on Israel. I started diversifying, from time to time. Nobody told me what to do.
- 2 At some point, I scanned my drawings, added a French caption, and succeeded in selling them to some French media, the weekly *Courrier International* to start with. It gave me a chance to internationalize my work which was only published in Hebrew until then. I wanted this deeply. For me, as an Israeli citizen with more than one culture, it didn’t feel far fetched to try.
- 3 After my success with *Courrier International*, I also translated into English and sent to CWS, they accepted, and I signed a contract. CWS (“Cartoonists and Writers Syndicate”) is one of the two big Cartoon Syndicates in the US. They can be found on the *New York Times* website, which gives them quite some visibility. I send them everything, and they select what they want. At the end of the year, I receive a check with a reference to all the publications of my cartoons.
- 4 In 2002 as well, I started collaborating with TV5 Monde, the French francophone channel. To this day, I send them 4 to 5 drawings a week for their weekly current affairs program “Kiosque”. Today they are my main client.
- 5 Finally, I also put my cartoons on my blog, on Facebook, but with a quality which is not good enough for publication.

- 6 There is another reason why I started internationalizing my work. In January 2002, after 9/11, the World Economic Forum of Davos, took place in New York, not in Davos, as a homage to the city of New York. For the first time, they invited cartoonists, including Gado from Kenya, Pat Oliphant, Plantu. They had 9, they wanted 10. Plantu said “*I have a friend in Israel*”. I was francophone, but I was an Israeli which made it interesting for them. Discovering the work of others, and gaining some confidence, despite the fact that my experience had been local so far, this is what gave me the strength to propose my work, to go to Paris, first to the offices of *Courrier International*. And it worked!
- 7 Davos invited cartoonists for 4 years, until 2006, until the affair of the Mahomet cartoons. They got cold feet. They were cartoonists from different countries, from Palestine, from Serbia, from South Africa...
- 8 TV5 Monde also invited cartoonists for a special edition of “Kiosque” in the summer, instead of foreign correspondents. So it gave us more opportunity to meet as cartoonists, and we became a family of sorts.
- 9 In 2005, the Jerusalem conference Center Mishkenot Shaananim received a big budget from the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. They proposed me to organize an international conference of cartoonists. I did it – it was a big success. I invited cartoonists from Japan, Singapore, Gado again from Kenya, an anti-Putin cartoonist from Russia... And a few months later, the affair of the Mohamed cartoons erupted. I invited several cartoonists from Arab countries; the only one who came was my colleague from Ramallah, Baha Bouhari.
- 10 On October 2006, the first conference of “Cartooning for Peace”¹ took place at the UN headquarters in New York. I was one of the people who started this association. Our work has also been followed by a Belgium team who is now preparing a documentary which

will be broadcast on Arte, the French-German Cultural TV channel, in the autumn this year.



Source: unknown

- 11 With all those opportunities, we went on meeting, debating, discussing our work. Cartoonists have a lot to say, although most of the time they are far from the cameras.
- 12 Regarding my political affiliations: when I started appearing on television, I met some people who would recognize me, or my voice, and they would congratulate me for my work, even mentioning that they didn't agree with me. Thus in the middle of the second Intifada, when I was dealing with events which were often tragic. For me it was quite an exercise, for example, to condemn a terrorist act, while saying I disagreed with the policy of my government. My temperament, however, is moderate, and deeply. I am not cruel or mean when I caricature a character.



© Kichka, Israel

- 13 When I started exporting my work, I could also feel the differences according to audiences. For TV5, they were cartoons I would send. I had no restrictions, they would just tell me the topics which would be debated live, and I could either use my existing drawings or draw new ones. It is true that I might have done, sometimes, a cartoon which was relatively “pro-Israeli”, compared to a rather “pro-Palestinian” point of view dominant in the French media. Some of those were not picked up by the channel. This is their decision and I respect it.

Cartoons among images

- 14 Images are the new battlefield, images which circulate through TV, Facebook, the smartphone; it's a new weapon. We could see it on Tahrir Square. It is because of demonstrators filming with smartphones, that they asked Al-Jazeera to keep on filming, that's why Al-J was accused of taking sides. Coming back to Tahrir Square, when a female demonstrator was drawn on the ground by policemen, a demonstrator filmed, sent the image, and it created an instant icon which circulated globally. In the case of the Tsunami, the icon was the Japanese woman wrapped up in her blanket, surrounded by piles of trash (it parallels the little girl burnt by Napalm in Vietnam).



© Kichka, Israel

- 15 The impact of images is instant, and it can be huge. This explains why the cartoon survives in this context; it is an image which can circulate and be read fast. When we had the first session of “Cartooning for Peace”, in the UN in New York, I remember Kofi Anan saying, “You can stop reading an editorial, you cannot stop seeing a cartoon.” While an editorial, if you disagree, after 15 lines, you stop reading it and you forget it. A strong image will stay a lot longer in the minds. And it’s true of cartoons as well: it makes an imprint in memory.

Cartoonists and photographers

- 16 Cartoonists and photojournalists are war reporters, although they work on different frontlines. Photojournalists are on the actual frontline, they expose themselves. See the number of them who were killed. Cartoonists sit home, get the pictures, depend on it, and draw. We are luxury journalists, we are no longer, as some years ago, on the frontline. Ronald Searle was in Vietnam. Shmulik Katz was send by Aman (the Intelligence Department) with his sketchbook in 1956. It doesn’t exist anymore.
- 17 Cartoonists have some time to think. While photographers don’t have time, all the more as now they film with their machines, and it’s almost broadcast quality. Cartoonists have the time to digest, to analyze a bit. The cartoonist today sits in front of his computer, sometimes with radio and TV on. The cartoonist has to imagine a follow-up to the image he gets. He must exaggerate, start from the real and push it in a little more absurd direction. He strikes at news from a different angle.
- 18 Every year, there is the World Press Photo, an exhibit which goes around the world. It’s interesting to see the different approaches, including from photographs. Let’s say we

have 100 photos of Hilary Clinton with Netanyahu at the Knesset. There isn't much room for maneuver here. In the end, one picture will come out of the thousand which will be taken then. A tough job. We, cartoonists, we must invent, and that makes our job interesting. And just as photographers, we created icons.

- 19 This morning I received a cartoon from my colleague Jeff Danziger, which shows Crime and Punishment....Shows the difference between the punishment of a regular criminal who will spend a lifetime and prison, and Bashar al-Assad who will get a *sauf-conduit* to Geneva after massacring a whole people. This, paralleling events which have nothing to do with each other, comparing, and judging, only cartoonists can do. On Assad, everything has been said, 16 months of massacre, so he uses a comparison... Danziger connects two different kinds of events, in order to rejuvenate the statement in his own way.



© Kichka, Israel

Three reasons for the decline of the political cartoon

- 20 The weight of the cartoon is a lot less than it used to be in the 19th century, before the invention of photography. The first page was a drawing (see *La Libre parole* de Drumont). Daumier used to make his lithograph, and the size will be the full first page. But it remains lively, despite its going down. For several reasons:
- 21 First, because of political correctness. Many drawings we could have done 20, 50, 100 years ago, are not accepted by editors today. US cartoonist Daryl Cagle said to me recently: "Editors like jokes, they don't like opinions". In France as well: the drawings of *Charlie Hebdo* can be published only there, same with the *Canard Enchaîné*. I don't think there is, in the US, a satirical political press of this kind. Art Spiegelman recently left the *New Yorker*, because he felt he couldn't express himself there anymore. When he proposed

his series “In the Shadow of the Dead Towers” to the *New Yorker*, the magazine refused, and it was published in a European newspaper: the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. Remember that he blamed Bush’s arrogance. The rare times when the *New Yorker* proposed a political cover, it provoked the most incredible debates. On Valentine Day, they had a cover by Spiegelman which showed an Ultra-Orthodox kissing a black woman. They received threats, insults, subscription cancellations. The editor first refused, Spiegelman had to insist. Same with a cover of the Obama couple as Muslims burning the US flag in the Oval room. For all that, the *New Yorker* is an exception. It started around 1923, and the principle that their cover is a drawing has been established since there.



© Kichka, Israel



© Kichka, Israel

- 22 In my case, for the drawings I send to my website/agency in the US, I have sometimes to censor myself, or they do it themselves. See those examples. You don’t use the word fuck, nor the fuck sign with the finger. They cut the fingers of Hugo Chavez in my cartoon,

when he got himself elected for life, saying “f... you” to his people. The drawing became meaningless.

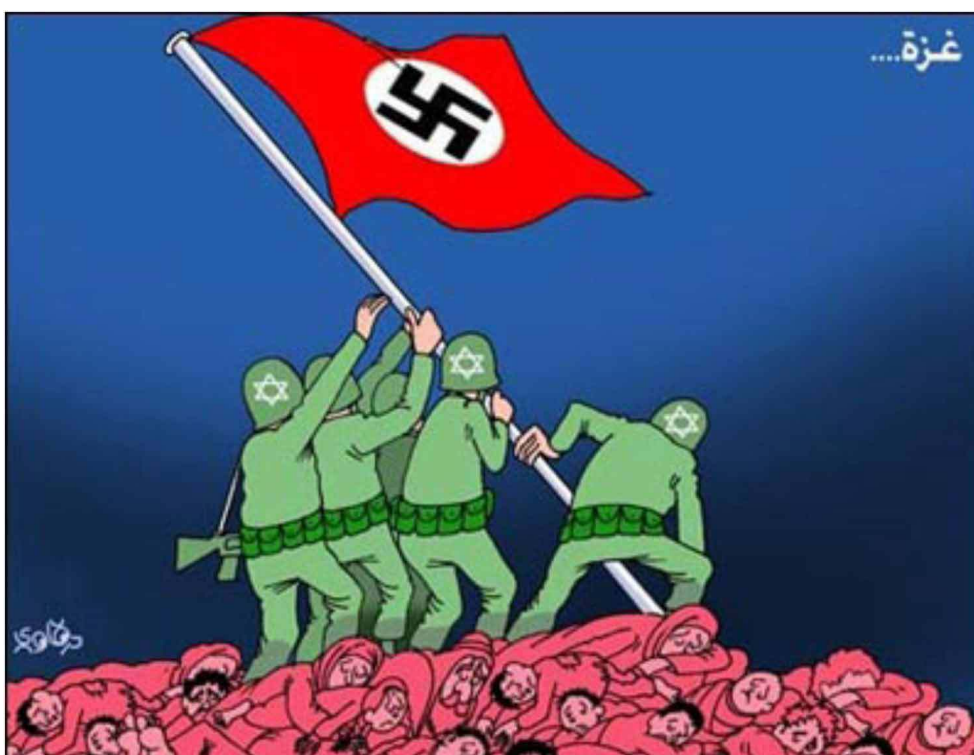
- 23 The second reason why the cartoon is declining is that we are going to moving images. I have a colleague who used to make 6 cartoons a week for the website of the *Washington Post*. Now she makes three small animated pictures. The still image, just like the still photograph, might be declining. We expect our images to be moving. In addition, she uses soundtracks based on actual soundbites by politicians, personalities.
- 24 Third reason: Some time ago, each newspaper had his cartoonist, on its regular staff, with an office. Now, they resort to agencies, to freelancing. In the US, there are two huge websites (agencies), where they show all the drawings by country and by cartoonist; you can click and buy! So the editors can decide about the images they want to show. They will choose a drawing which won't irritate their readership. They tend to remove the provoking part, which is the basis of the cartoon. In addition, since 9/11 and the 2006 Mohamed cartoons affairs, there is a debate in the press. Some cartoonists see themselves threatened, if not expelled from their newspapers. Religious fundamentalism, of all kinds, is threatening freedom, in this field in particular. On July 10, 2012, Plantu did a drawing in *Le Monde*, when there was a debate on the GIUS of Ultra-Orthodox Jews in Israel. He got a letter from Richard Prasquier, the chairman of the CRIF, the Umbrella organization of Jews in France². There is also a lobby of Catholics on the lookout, who protested, for example, about some drawing on the scandal of pedophiles in the Church. The same Plantu was criticized for this. (Full disclosure: he is a friend, but this has no relation with the claim I make here). At least, we, the cartoonists, have the advantage of being openly subjective, compared to photographers whose technology have claim to objectivity, and yet can be so easily manipulated through Photoshop, as the example of the photographer sacked by Reuters for adding clouds over Beirut during the 2006 Lebanon War.

Analyzing some cartoons. Quotes and icons

- 25 It's interesting to see how some themes, icons, reoccur, are re-exploited, how cartoons quote other cartoons, photographs, etc.



Photo Joe Rosenthal, 1954.



Source: Anti Defamation League



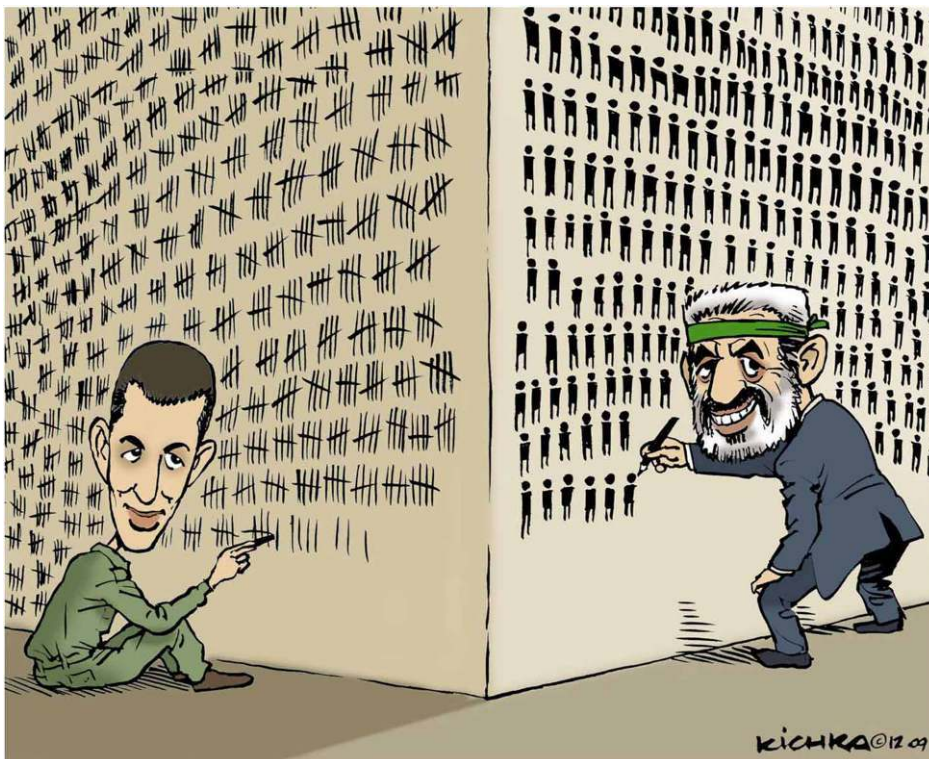
© Kichka, Israel

- 26 Take the case of the American soldiers raising the flag at Iwo Jima. It started as a photograph, it became a sculpture. It's been countlessly reused, for example in the Israeli Palestinian conflict. Here is a group of Israeli soldiers as Nazis raising a flag over Palestinian corpses. I don't know the author. In that case it is not only a quote, but also an outrageous comparison between Israeli soldiers and Nazis, which has, unfortunately, a long history already. It is nothing but pure antisemitic hatred.
- 27 I, personally, used this Iwo Jima Icon when Clint Eastwood directed his movie *Letter from Iwo Jima*, I transformed the American soldiers into Japanese soldiers, to convey the audacity of the American director dealing with the suffering of Japanese prisoners.
- 28 This is the famous picture of David Rubinger in 1967, when the Israeli soldiers faced the Western Wall. He got a special authorization for accompanying the troops. Dover Tsahal, the information service of the army, had just asked him to give them a negative as a gift, which Tsahal used without paying the rights. He sued them! Years after. Here is the picture exploited as a cartoon, stressing that the heroes of yesterday now can receive stones – that was at the time of the first Intifada.



© Eyal Eilat, Israel

- 29 Look at the following cartoons about Gilad Shalit, based on the contrast between numbers: the numbers of Palestinians prisoners liberated as a “ransom” for Gilad Shalit. They all variations around the same idea, and cannot be expressed in a photography.



© Kichka, Israel

Gilad Shalit against 1027 Palestinians



© Chappate, Switzerland

- 30 Here is Mohammed Al Dura, who became an icon. Whatever the interpretation of the picture, it is everywhere. This is a graffiti I found on the net. This is rather a balanced interpretation, through the caption. The Tunisian Republic did a stamp about of it. It's been used endlessly.

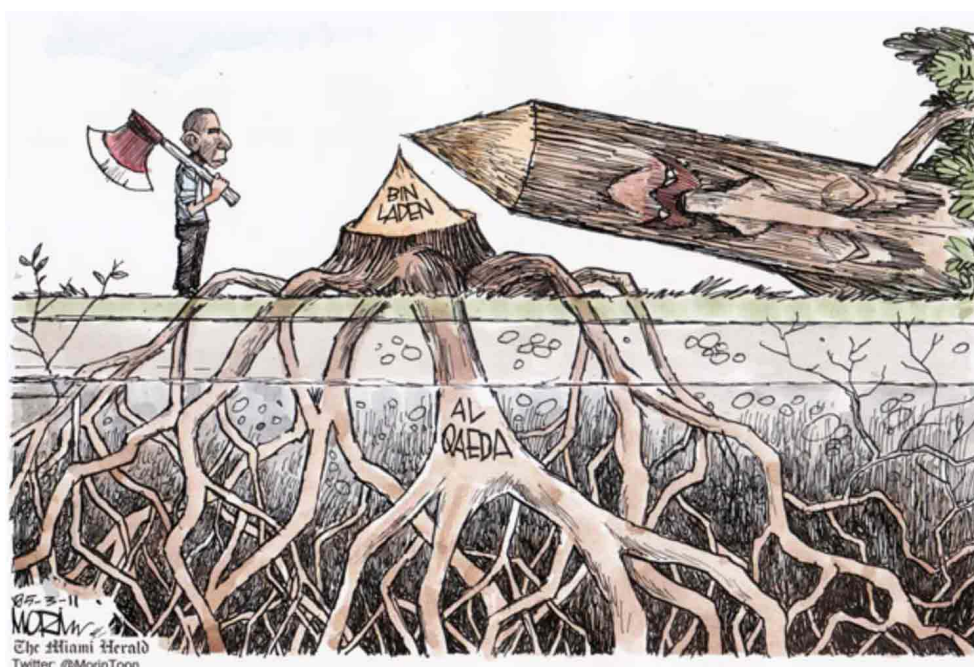


Source: unknown

- 31 Sometimes there is a need for a picture when there is none, and cartoonists can step him, as in the case of Ben Laden. Jim Morin, from the *Miami Herald*, and I, had the same idea of Bin Laden as a monster one head of which only was cut off. This is another drawing, when Ben Laden was killed. In many ways, it could be said to be prophetic.



© Kichka, Israel



© Morin, USA

- 32 Allusions and quotes are not always understood. For examples, in a recent poll, many young French had no idea what the “Rafle du Vel d’Hiv” was about. It’s important when some people reuse icons of the Holocaust, of the Second World War. Some culture is needed to interpret some images.

Takings sides. The Gaza flotilla

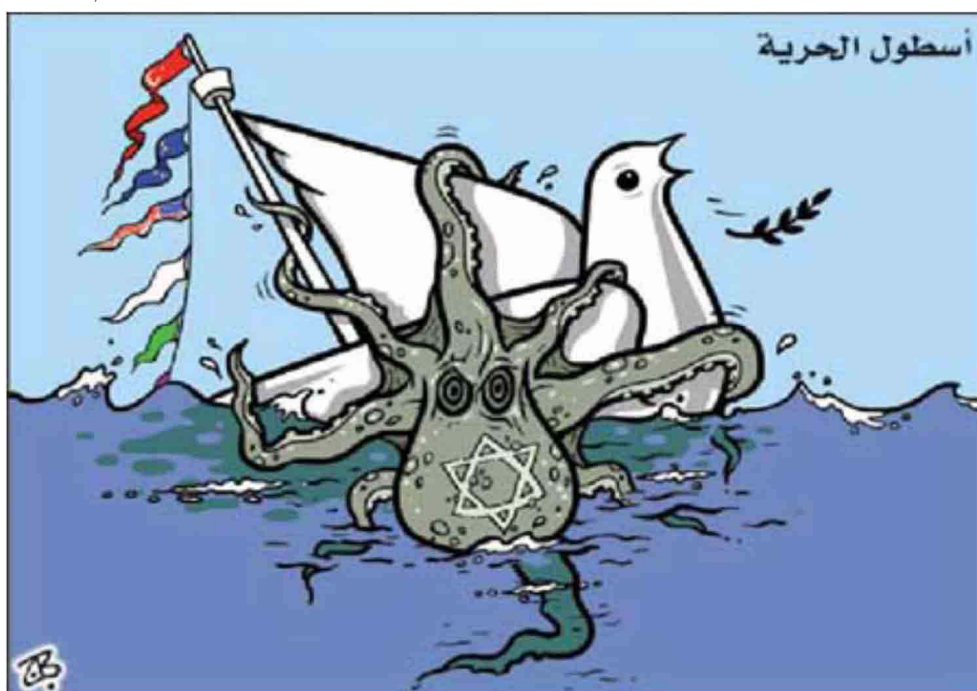
- 33 Here are a few cartoons of the flotilla. No doubt that the army behaved in an amateurish fashion. Here is Barrigue, a Swiss cartoonist. I like this drawing, it hurts, but there is something right about it. Here is an excellent drawing supporting the flotilla. This is a dark ice flow, representing Israel, which an innocent boat succeeds in breaking. There were few drawings, like this American one, to justify the Israeli action. I followed the works of the commission who decided on the assault, it was done in a nonsensical way. They sent them to a disaster.



© Barrigue, Switzerland



© Kichka, Israel



© Hajjaj, Jordan



© Hajjaj, Jordan

- 34 This is what I did. The morning of the news, I was in a conference at the Susan Dallal center. I heard the opening conference where Bernard-Henry Lévy spoke of the event, I did a sketch which I finalized later. I wanted to stress the fact that Israel fell in a trap, that they lost the war of images because of the stupidity of Avigdor Lieberman.
- 35 This is anti-Israeli, with a classic antisemitic reference to the huge Jewish octopus, in this case with a Star of David, grabbing the little boat. The cartoonist is Emad Hajjaj. He also has a website which the name of his main character, "Mahjoob". Here it does something which is becoming popular: reproduce and modify some icons of the Holocaust, turning the Israelis into Nazis, and the Palestinians into Jews. I think this comparison, in the end, filters into the minds of many readers, without the culture to understand what it is about.
- 36 Hajjaj draws for a Jordanian newspaper. For years the big American websites refused to publish his cartoons. Then, in order to get some work in the US, he started to change his ways of drawing against Israel. In this drawing, he got back to his old ways.
- 37 Are they many cartoonists who did the same, and tried to adapt to the US? It's not easy. For one thing, the Americans are used to a certain way of drawing. Hajjaj has a somehow realistic style. This can be accepted. Most do not fit.

Some antisemitic drawings or cartoonists



© Latuff, Brazil

- 38 This is Carlos Latuff from Brazil, who is a good cartoonist, not very subtle. And a well-know antisemite. He is an anti-Globalism, a pro-Palestinian, an anti-Zionist, and an antisemite. It gets a bit mixed up in his drawings, which I think are published mostly on radical websites.



18 April 2002

After a wave of suicide bombings, the Israeli army bombards and bulldozes the Jenin refugee camp and blocks humanitarian relief

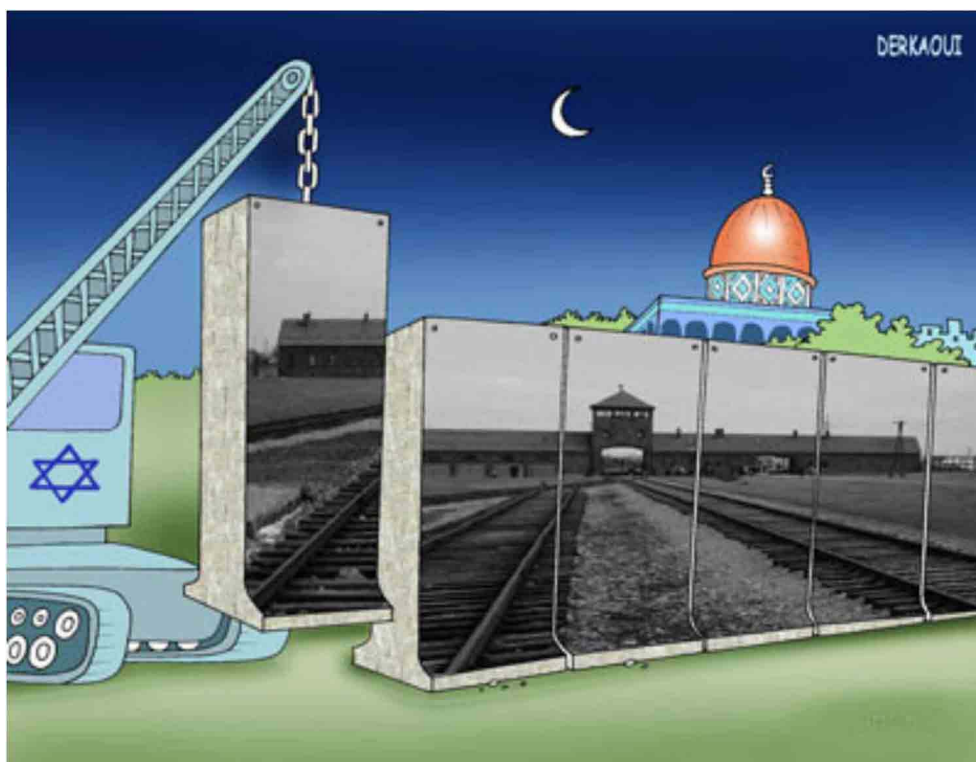
© Zapiro, South Africa

- 39 This is from Jonathan Zapiro, Jewish south-African, whom is a friend. I was very irritated by this drawing. He paid a high price for his cartoons during the Apartheid period. What is problematic in the drawing you see, it is the comparison between Ariel Sharon and a Nazi officer. Again, the famous comparison. It is entirely unacceptable. In addition, there has been no massacre in Jenin in 2002. 27 Israeli soldiers were killed there.



© Hajjaj, Jordan

- 40 Here are a few more examples. Of drawings which won a prize at the Iranian “International Holocaust Cartoon Competition”. The first prize went to a Moroccan cartoonist, Abdellah Derkaoui, the second to Carlos Latuff. Both resort to the same comparison of Palestine with a concentration camp.



© Derkaoui, Morocco



© Latuff, Brazil

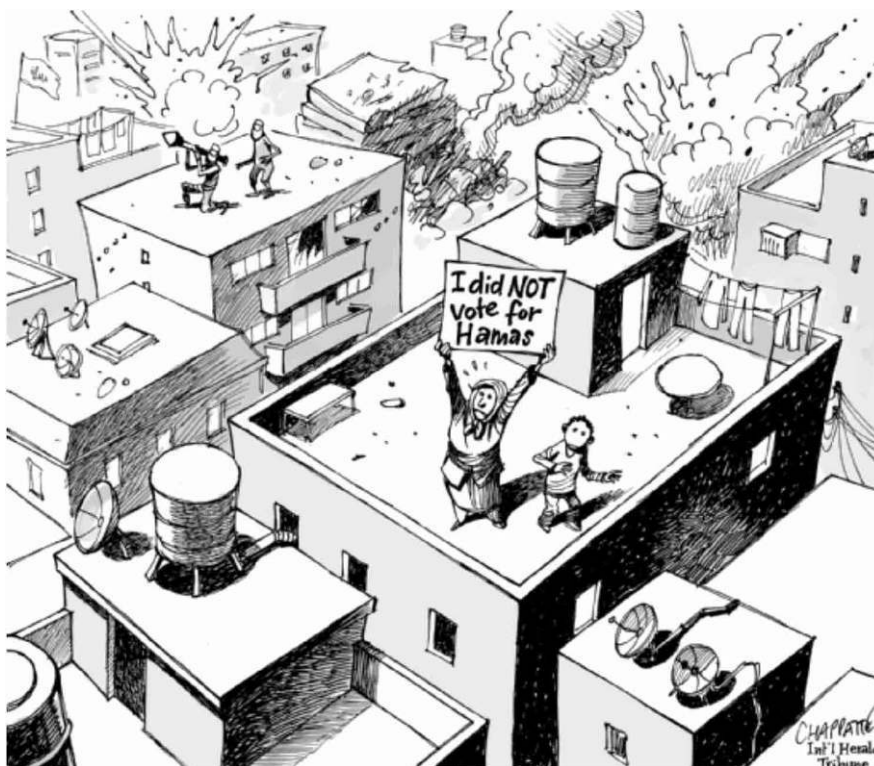
- 41 A few years later, I was invited to Doha, in Qatar, to the “World Press Freedom Day”, or supposed to be. I did this drawing of my father, who was in Auschwitz, with Ahmadinejad trying to erase, unsuccessfully, his tattooed number.



© Kichka, Israel

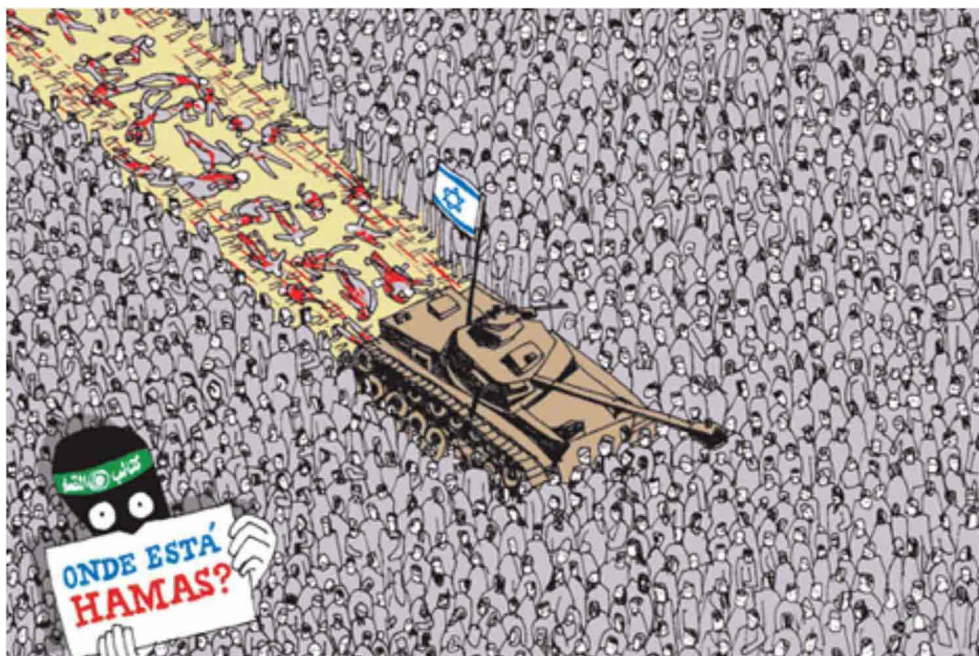
Criticizing both sides

- 42 Here is an excellent drawing by the Swiss Chappatte, of the Gazans taken hostage by the Hamas: with the woman holding a board saying “I didn’t vote for Hamas”, on the roof of her house being bombed by Israel.



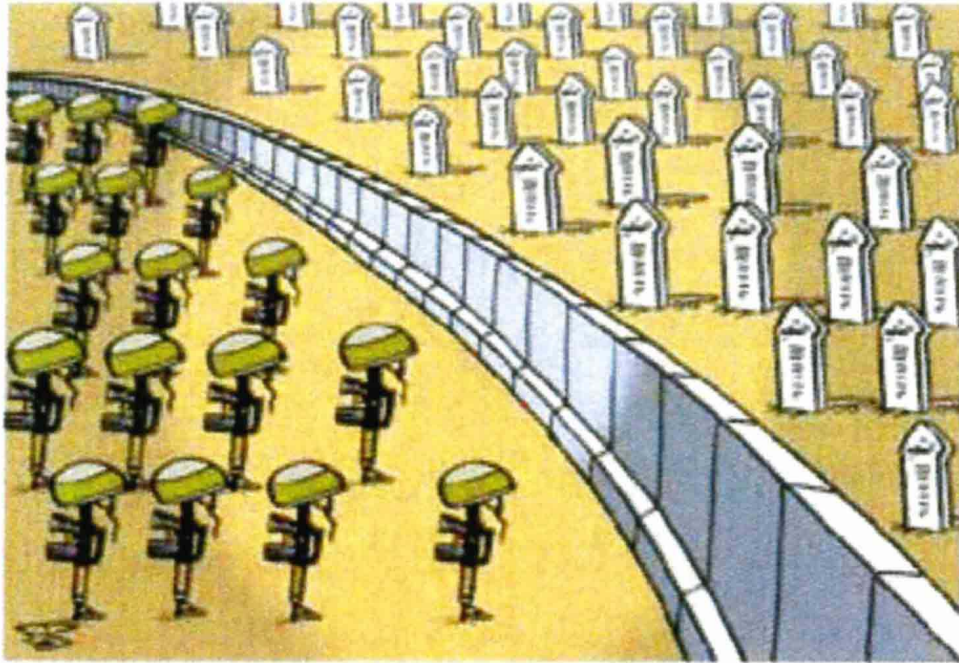
© Chappate, Switzerland

- 43 Another excellent drawing, typical of what the cartoonist can do: it is mixing a very popular album *Where is Charlie*, with current affairs. It incriminates Israel, of course, as we see an Israeli tank crushing people in a dense crowd, while looking for the invisible Hamas, while the “Where is Charlie” (in this crowd) is replaced by “Where is Hamas”. But, in a way, the Hamas as well for hiding in the crowd.



© Antonio Jorge Gonçalves, Portugal

- 44 Here is a drawing which shows victims on both sides, by my colleague Baha Boukhari from Ramallah. It is not obvious, and courageous for a Palestinian, to show victims on both sides. I think that the fact that he is a member of “Cartoonists for Peace”, may positively affect his point of view.



© Baha Bouhari, Palestine

- 45 This is a drawing of the best Belgian cartoonist, Pierre Kroll, where you see a Palestinian and an Israeli sharing the land by digging graves together. It says it all.

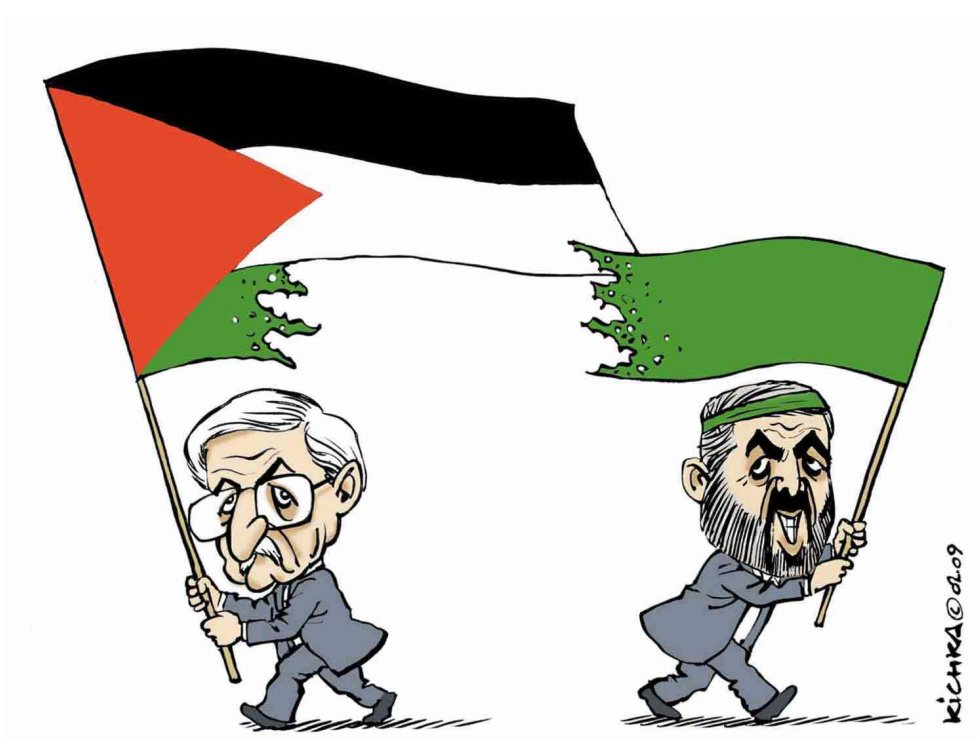


© Kroll, Belgium

- 46 This is Khalil Abu Arafah in 2006, at the time of the fights between Hamas and Fatah. He shows both clans celebrating, at the expense of the Palestinian people. This is a courageous drawing.



© Khalil Abu Arafah, East-Jerusalem



© Kichka, Israel

NOTES

1. See <http://www.cartooningforpeace.org/>
 2. See <http://www.crif.org/fr/leditorialdupresident/lettre-ouverte-a-plantu/31966>
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ABSTRACTS

Looking back on his beginnings as a political cartoonist for Israeli TV, Kichka explains how he got the opportunity to internationalize his work and of experiencing different media, editorial lines and audiences. He describes the debates between cartoonists about the necessary subjectivity of their approach, critics the anti-Semitism of some cartoons and talks about the *Cartooning for Peace*'s family of which he is a founding member. Considering the role of cartoon among images, Kichka shows that, despite the recent decline of the political cartoon, the cartoonists, like the photographers, create icons.

Revenant sur ses débuts en tant que dessinateur de presse, notamment pour la télévision israélienne, Kichka explique comment il a eu l'opportunité d'internationaliser son travail et de s'ouvrir à différents médias, différentes lignes éditoriales et des publics divers. Il décrit les débats entre dessinateurs de presse à propos de la subjectivité inhérente à leur démarche, critique l'antisémitisme de certains dessins et parle aussi de la famille de *Cartooning for Peace*, dont il est un membre fondateur. Analysant le rôle des dessins par rapport aux images, Kichka montre qu'en dépit du récent déclin du dessin politique les dessinateurs de presse, à l'instar des photographes, créent de véritables icônes.

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Michel Kichka, born in Belgium in a family of Holocaust survivors, is a political cartoonist and an illustrator for press and children books. Guest cartoonist at the World Economic Forum in Davos, NYC and Jordan, Kichka is a member of "Cartooning for Peace" founded by Plantu and Kofi Annan. He received in 2009 the "Dosh Award" for the best achievement in Israeli Cartoonist. His last book, *Second Generation*, a graphic novel, was published in 2012 (Dargaud).